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Oceanic Digital Poetry: Paradigms for 21st Century Poetics

What is truly new about poetry in the twenty-first century is the fact that computational agents (algorithms, metadata, hardware, software, etc.) participate in the the production, reception, and analysis of it. Algorithms and AI agents serve not only as platform, medium, and interface but also as collaborators, even “co-cognizers” (to use N. Katherine Hayles’s term). The human is no longer the center, the primary writer or reader of poetry, and the implications of this fact are wide and deep.

In *Bookishness*, I explored this topic by way of one of my favorite transmedia book-focused and very bookish books of poetry: Amaranth Borsuk’s *Between Page and Screen* (2012). Other scholars offer different ways of attending to this situation. For example Rita Raley (2021) focuses on AI and machine learning; Matthew Kirschenbaum (2016) explores the implications of Microsoft Word and other software of literary production; Mark McGurl (2021) argues that Amazon—the corporation and algorithm – is the most important force in contemporary literature. In this talk, I pursue a different path towards thinking about this massive shift in the production, reception, and aesthetics of contemporary poetics by way of the emergent interdisciplinary field of Blue Humanities.

In which ways might the study of poetics expand when we recognize how poetry is centered around humans and land, i.e. anthropocentric and also terrestrial? What might we learn from artists and scholars thinking about and *through* water? This talk explores how the Ocean has been an agent in digital poetics for decades, particularly in the field of born-digital literature, and deserves sustained attention now. Reading oceanic e-poetry from the 1990s to the present, I show how the Ocean is part of the history of digital poetry. More than just poetic trope or discursive metaphor for digital poetics, the Ocean is also the environmental and medial context for the technological networks that enable the digital. I blend literary analysis and media archaeology to consider how the Ocean serves as a central force in digital poetry and suggest that turning our gaze to the oceanic horizon offers news ways of thinking about poetry and emergent poetics.

BIO:

Jessica Pressman is a scholar of 20th and 21st-century experimental literature, digital literature, media theory and book history. She is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University, where she co-founded SDSU’s Digital Humanities Initiative (dh.sdsh.edu). Pressman is the author of *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (Columbia University Press, 2020), *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media* (Oxford University Press, 2014), co-author, with Mark C. Marino and Jeremy Douglass, of *ReadingProject: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone’s Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (University of Iowa Press, 2015). She co-edited two volumes: *Comparative Textual Media:*

Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) with N. Katherine Hayles and *Book Presence in a Digital Age* (Bloomsbury Press, 2018) with Kiene Brillenburg Wurth and Kári Driscoll. Her full CV can be found at www.jessicapressman.com.